
Melusina (Melusine, Mélusine)

legends about mermaids, water sprites, and forest nymphs
who marry mortal men,
translated and/or edited by



[D. L. Ashliman](#)

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Water People

Paracelsus

Water people can come to us from their waters, let themselves be seen, deal with us, and be with us, and then go back into their waters. They have the appearance of humans, but like animals, they have no souls. However, if a marriage takes place between a mermaid and a man from Adam, and she keeps house with him, and gives birth, then these children take after the man. Because the father is a man from Adam, a soul is poured into such a child and it becomes a real human being, who has a soul and eternal life.

Now if a mermaid marries a man from Adam, she also receives a soul, so that like other women she is redeemed by God and through God. Before such a marriage, mermaids have the appearance of humans, but they have no soul. However, if they enter into a covenant with man, God gives them a soul.

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- Source (books.google.com): Paracelsus, "[Liber de Nymphis, Sylphis, Pygmæis et Salamandris, et de cæteris Spiritibus](#)," *Bücher und Schriften*, vol. 9 (Basel: Conrad Waldkirch, 1591), [pp. 61-62](#).
 - [Paracelsus](#) (original name: Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim) was born about 1493 in Einsiedeln, Switzerland, and died 1541 in Salzburg, Austria.
 - According to Paracelsus, each of the four traditional elements (water, air, earth, and fire) was inhabited by a class of invisible beings, respectively: [Nymphs](#), [Sylphs](#), [Pygmies](#), and [Salamanders](#). The water people (*Nymphs*) were also called *Undines*.
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The True Melusina

Paracelsus

You should know the story of the Melusinas, who swim on the water and yet live in the air and not in the water and are not endowed with shame. There you would read about the true Melusina, who had children with a Christian in France in the Château de Lusignan, how she became a monstrous animal every Saturday, which was a fish beneath her navel and a human above.

If you do not want to believe this, then because of your unbelief you are accusing God the Creator of lying. Any such person will have to answer to God.

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- Source (Internet Archive): Paracelsus, [Sämtliche Werke](#), vo. 14 (Munich and Berkub: R. Oldenbourg, 1933), [pp. 575-76](#).
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The Fair Melusina

Albania

There was a king who ruled over Albania, and he was very sad, for his wife had died. He kept by himself, and would not be comforted; but at last his courtiers coaxed him to go a-hunting, and so dearly did he love the chase that he forgot his grief.

Now one day in the woods he was thirsty, and drew near a spring to quench his thirst. And as he drew near, he heard a sweet voice singing, and it was none other than the voice of the fairy Pressina. He was alone, and he sat long listening to her song.

That was how at first he came to know the fairy. And she was so sweet and gentle that by and by he persuaded her to be his wife. It was not a very wise thing for a fairy to wed a mortal, and Pressina promised only on condition that he should never come to see her when she had children.

The king gladly promised, and meant to keep his word; but one day, the king's son by his former wife came hastily to him, and told him that Pressina had given birth to three daughters. The king was overjoyed. He forgot his promise and flew to her chamber, where he found her bathing her three daughters.

Pressina cried bitterly that he had broken his word, and he should see her no more. She took her three daughters and disappeared. Where did she go? Why, to the Lost Island. That was so called because it was only by chance that one ever found it, and even if one found it once, he might easily lose it, and never find it again. Here she reared her children, and when they were grown, she took them every day to the top of a mountain, whence they could look down upon Albania.

"My children," she would say, "you see that distant, beautiful country. There your father lives. He is king of the land, and there you might now be living happily if he had not broken his word to me, and I could no longer live with him, for I had warned him of this, and a fairy may not break her word."

This went on year after year, and at last when they were fifteen years old, Melusina, who was the first to be born, begged her mother to tell them what was the word their father gave, and how he came to break it. And when she heard the story, she was filled with wrath, and laid a plot with her sisters for revenge upon their father.

The three maidens said nothing to Pressina, but secretly set out for Albania. As they were half fairies, they could use the fairies' charms, and this they did. They seized the king their father, and shut him up forever in the heart of a mountain. Then they went back in triumph, and told their mother what they had done.

But Pressina was not at all pleased. She did not wish the king, her husband, thus put out of the way, and she punished her children for what they had done. The other two she punished lightly, but she condemned Melusina to become, every Saturday, a serpent from her waist downward. The only escape for her was to find a husband, who would promise never to look upon her on a Saturday, and who would keep his word. So long as he was faithful, all would be well.

The fair Melusina now began to roam through the world in search of this faithful husband. She was most beautiful to behold, and had every grace to make her winsome; but it was long before she could meet the man of her search. She passed through the Black Forest, and at last came to a place known as the Fountain of the Fairies, for there were many fairies about the place; it was called also the Fountain of Thirst.

It chanced that Count Raymond strayed that way one moonlight night, and there he saw three fairies dancing, but the most beautiful of the three was the fair Melusina. She was so sweet and gentle that he fell madly in love with her, and begged her to marry him.

The fair Melusina knew that she had at last found the man for whom she had been waiting and looking. Yes, she would marry him, but on one condition only. He must never look upon her on a Saturday. And Count Raymond solemnly promised that he never would.

All went well for a while. They were happy together, but the evil that the fair Melusina had done lived on. For as each child was born into the world, it was crooked and ill to look on. Yet this did not lessen Count Raymond's love for the fair Melusina. All might still have gone well had not someone whispered to the count that it would be wise for him to see what Melusina was doing on Saturday.

It was a foolish count. He became more and more curious, and at last one Saturday he hid himself where he could see, and not be seen, and thus he watched for Melusina in her chamber.

O pity of pities! He saw her, the fair Melusina, but from the waist down she was a serpent, with silvery scales, tipped with white. He covered his eyes. It was too late, and he was seized with horror, not so much at what he had seen as at the thought of how he had broken his faith. Perhaps he might yet have kept silence. But a great evil fell upon him. One of his sons had cruelly killed a brother, and Count Raymond was beside himself with grief. Suddenly he thought how all his children had been born crooked, and how it must have been because of some wicked thing their mother had done. And as he was thus weeping and wailing in the midst of his courtiers, the fair Melusina came in to comfort him.

When he saw her, he burst into a rage, and cried out aloud: "Away! Out of my sight, thou hateful serpent! Thou wicked woman!"

Down to the ground dropped the fair Melusina in a swoon; and when she came to herself, she looked with sad eyes on her lord. She knew, then, that her time had come, and that she could not escape her punishment. The man she had been faithful to had not kept his word.

"Farewell! Farewell!" she moaned. "Alas for the misery I am in. I had hoped that thou hadst been faithful, and that I might escape my doom. It may not be. The mortal in me dies, but in my fairy life I must forever fleet about the earth as a poor lost spirit."

And at that, with a little faint cry, her body fell again, but there was a rustling in the air as the fair Melusina set forth on her lone wandering. Count Raymond and those about him saw her no more. But whenever in after years there was a new lord over the castle, the country folk said that she hovered about the Fountain of Thirst, a poor forlorn wraith.

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- Source: Horace E. Scudder, [*The Book of Legends: Told Over Again*](#) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1899), [pp. 65-70](#).
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Legend of Melusina

France

Elinas, King of Albania, to divert his grief for the death of his wife, amused himself with hunting. One day, at the chase, he went to a fountain to quench his thirst. As he approached it he heard the voice of a woman singing, and on coming to it he found there the beautiful fay Pressina.

After some time the fay bestowed her hand upon him, on the condition that he should never visit her at the time of her lying-in. She had three daughters at a birth: Melusina, Melior, and Palatina. Nathas, the king's son by a former wife, hastened to convey the joyful tidings to his father, who, without reflection, flew to the chamber of the queen, and entered as she was bathing her daughters. Pressina, on seeing him, cried out that he had broken his word, and she must depart. And taking up her three daughters, she disappeared.

She retired to the Lost Island, so called because it was only by chance any, even those who had repeatedly visited it, could find it. Here she reared her children, taking them every morning to a high mountain, whence Albania might be seen, and telling them that but for their father's breach of promise they might have lived happily in the distant land which they beheld.

When they were fifteen years of age, Melusina asked her mother particularly of what their father had been guilty. On being informed of it, she conceived the design of being revenged on him. Engaging her sisters to join in her plans, they set out for Albania. Arrived there, they took the king and all his wealth, and, by a charm, enclosed him in a high mountain, called Brandelois. On telling their mother what they had done, she, to punish them for the unnatural action, condemned Melusina to become every Saturday a serpent, from the waist downwards, till she should meet a man who would marry her under the condition of never seeing her on a Saturday, and should keep his promise. She influenced other judgements on her two sisters, less severe in proportion to their guilt.

Melusina now went roaming through the world in search of the man who was to deliver her. She passed through the Black Forest, and that of Ardennes, and at last she arrived in the forest of Colombiers, in Poitou, where all the fays of the neighborhood came before her, telling her they had been waiting for her to reign in that place.

Raymond having accidentally killed the count, his uncle, by the glancing aside of his boar-spear, was wandering by night in the forest of Colombiers. He arrived at a fountain that rose at the foot of a high rock. This fountain was called by the people the Fountain of Thirst, or the Fountain of the Fays, on account of the many marvelous things which had happened at it.

At the time, when Raymond arrived at the fountain, three ladies were diverting themselves there by the light of the moon, the principal of which was Melusina. Her beauty and her amiable manners quickly won his love. She soothed him, concealed the deed he had done, and married him, he promising on his oath never to desire to see her on a Saturday. She assured him that a breach of his oath would forever deprive him of her whom he so much loved, and be followed by the unhappiness of both for life. Out of her great wealth she built for him, in the neighborhood of the Fountain of Thirst, where he first saw her, the castle of Lusignan. She also built La Rochelle, Cloitre Malliers, Mersent, and other places.

But destiny, that would have Melusina single, was incensed against her. The marriage was made unhappy by the deformity of the children born of one that was enchanted. But still Raymond's love for the beauty that ravished both heart and eyes remained unshaken. Destiny renewed her attacks. Raymond's cousin had excited him to jealousy and to secret concealment, by malicious suggestions of the purport of the Saturday retirement of the countess. He hid himself; and then saw how the lovely form of Melusina ended below in a snake, gray and sky-blue, mixed with white. But it was not horror that seized him at the sight, it was infinite anguish at the reflection that through his breach of faith he might lose his lovely wife forever.

Yet this misfortune had not speedily come on him, were it not that his son, Geoffroi with the Tooth [a boar's tusk projected from his mouth], had burned his brother Freimund, who would stay in the abbey of Malliers, with the abbot and a hundred monks. At which the afflicted father, Count Raymond, when his wife Melusina was entering his closet to comfort him, broke out into these words against her, before all the courtiers who attended her, "Out of my sight, thou pernicious snake and odious serpent! thou contaminator of my race!"

Melusina's former anxiety was now verified, and the evil that had lain so long in ambush had now fearfully sprung on him and her. At these reproaches she fainted away; and when at length she revived, full of the profoundest grief, she declared to him that she must now depart from him, and, in obedience to a decree of destiny, fleet about the earth in pain and suffering, as a specter, until the day of doom; and that only when one of her race was to die at Lusignan would she become visible.

Her words at parting were these, "But one thing will I say unto thee before I part, that thou, and those who for more than a hundred years shall succeed thee, shall know that whenever I am seen to hover over the fair castle of Lusignan, then will it be certain that in that very year the castle will get a new lord; and though people may not perceive me in the air, yet they will see me by the Fountain of Thirst; and thus shall it be so long as the castle stand in honor and flourishing -- especially on the Friday before the lord of the castle shall die."

Immediately, with wailing and loud lamentation, she left the castle of Lusignan, and has ever since existed as a specter of the night.

Raymond died as a hermit on Monserrat.

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- Source: Thomas Keightley, *[The Fairy Mythology, Illustrative of the Romance and Superstition of Various Countries](#)* (London: H. G. Bohn, 1850), [pp. 480-82](#).
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The Legend of Beautiful Melusina, the Ancestress of Luxembourg Counts

Luxembourg

Many hundreds of years ago a noble knight, Count Siegfried, lived at K rich Castle. Once he lost his way while hunting, and toward evening he found himself in a narrow, deep, and wildly overgrown valley. This was the Valley of the Alzette at the place where today the suburbs of Luxembourg City picturesquely blend with the cliffs.

Rising before him, the count could see sheer rock cliffs, upon which stood the ruins of an ancient Roman castle. Suddenly the sounds of wonderful singing fell upon the startled knight's ears. After listening for a time, the count hurried in the direction that the sounds were coming from, and soon he discovered a maiden sitting among the castle's ruins. Captivated by her beauty, he stood still. It was Melusina, the Nixie of the Alzette. With a fixed gaze Siegfried stared at the otherworldly vision.

Seeing the handsome knight, the maiden covered her face with her green veil, then disappeared with the last rays of the evening sun.

Overcome with fatigue, Count Siegfried lay down beneath a tree and fell asleep. The next morning the song of a bird awoke him from a blissful dream. He got up and followed the river. He soon found himself in the familiar vicinity of Weimerskirch, and from there he returned straight away to his homeland.

The vision of the beautiful maiden and her wonderful singing had mightily captivated the count's soul. He often returned to the place, now very dear to him, in order to see her and hear her again. Once he met her in the valley, for she took pleasure in the count's visits, and she had fallen in love with the handsome knight.

He rushed toward her, declared his love for her, and asked her to become his wife. She consented under the condition that she not be required to leave the cliffs, and that he would never ask to see her on Saturdays, when she wished to be alone. Under oath the count promised this to her.

Siegfried entered into an agreement with the Abbot of St. Maximin near Trier to trade the former's fruitful commune of Feulen near Ettelbruck for the latter's infertile rocky cliffs and their surrounding woodlands.

Because it would have taken years of time and great expense to build a castle on the rocky cliffs, where he could take Melusina home as his wife, Siegfried gladly accepted the help of Satan, who offered to build the castle for him and make him exceedingly wealthy if the count would surrender himself after thirty years. At the top of the cliffs a magnificent castle appeared overnight, proudly looking down on the valley below.

Siegfried married the beautiful Melusina and lived happily with her. Melusina presented him with seven children.

However, every Saturday the nixie remained hidden from all eyes, retiring to her room and locking the door. This proceeded for many long years without her husband asking her what she was doing on those days.

However, his friends, who with time learned about the situation, planted seeds of distrust in the count against his good wife. Now, at any price, Siegfried wanted to know why Melusina withdrew from him every Saturday.

The next Saturday he secretly approached her room. From inside he could hear the sound of rushing and splashing water. Looking into the room through the keyhole he saw his wife in her bathtub combing her long blond hair with a golden comb. Her beautiful limbs ended with a horrible fishtail, with which she was splashing waves. The count uttered a cry of horror, and in the same moment Melusina sank into the depths of the cliffs. Siegfried had lost her forever.

They say that the nurse who was caring for Siegfried's and Melusina's youngest child often saw a white figure enter the room at night and rock the child to sleep.

Every seven years Melusina appears in human form in the upper world above the cliffs, asking the passers-by to redeem her. If this does not happen, the white figure soars over the city crying, "Not for another seven years!" then sinks back into the cliffs.

For this reason, when Luxembourg was still a fortress, sentry duty was so feared that even the bravest soldiers were terrified when they had to keep watch at night.

One time a courageous soldier who had traded shifts with a comrade was standing guard on the cliff-top between twelve and two o'clock in the night. Melusina appeared to him in the form of a beautiful maiden and asked him to redeem her. She told him that it would be a difficult, but not impossible, task. However, he should not attempt it if he thought that he might not succeed, because if he failed she would sink three times deeper into the earth. While she was thus speaking there arose a mighty rumbling sound around the cliffs, causing the soldier to fear that they were about to collapse.

The soldier promised to fulfill Melusina's wish, whatever he might have to do. She said that for the nine following days, every night at exactly twelve o'clock -- neither one minute earlier nor one minute later -- he would have to appear behind the altar of the Dominican Church. After he had done this nine times, on the tenth evening she would appear to him in the form of a fiery serpent with a key in her mouth. With his mouth he would have to take the key from her mouth and then throw it into the Alzette River, which would accomplish her redemption. This act would also restore the Roman castle atop the cliff in its former state.

For eight nights the soldier stood behind the appointed altar at precisely twelve o'clock, but on the ninth night he arrived late. Returning to his quarters he heard such howling and screeching coming from the cliffs that he thought all the wild animals were fighting one another in the air. However, no other person heard the noise.

It is also said that whenever Luxembourg City is threatened by danger or mishap, Melusina circles the cliffs while crying out mournfully.

Thus even to this day Melusina has not been redeemed. Woe unto the Luxembourg City if she is not someday redeemed. She will be redeemed only when she finishes the shirt that she is working on, gathering flax from the naked cliffs and adding one stitch every seven years when she appears on the cliffs. However, the ruins of the city will serve as her gravestone.

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- Source: N. Gredt, "Die Sage von der schönen Melusina, der Ahnfrau der Luxemburger Grafen," [*Sagenschatz des Luxemburger Landes*](#) (Luxembourg: Druck von B. Bück, 1883), [pp. 7-9](#).
 - Gredt's source: "Gonner's *Mitteilungen* and oral."
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2015.
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Melusina (Soldiers' Legend)

Luxembourg

Once at midnight Melusina approached a sentry beneath the Castle Gate Bridge. She asked him to redeem her. For this to succeed, the following midnight she would appear to him in the form of a serpent with a key in her mouth. He was to take the key into his mouth and then lay it on the altar of the Dominican Church. Then she would become his bride, and all her treasures would belong to him.

When she thus appeared to him, the soldier turned ice cold, and he was overcome with shuddering.

The following day the death-bell tolled down from the old cathedral, and in the cemetery a grave was dug for the young warrior.

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- Source: N. Gredt, "Die Sage von der schönen Melusina, der Ahnfrau der Luxemburger Grafen," [*Sagenschatz des Luxemburger Landes*](#) (Luxembourg: Druck von B. Bück, 1883), [p. 9](#).
 - Gredt's source: Theodor von Cederstolpe, [*Sagen von Luxemburg, poetisch bearbeitet*](#), (Luxembourg: Franz Rehm, 1850), [pp. 5-6](#).
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 2015.
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The Mysterious Maiden Mélusine

Luxembourg

Mélusine is said to have been the wife of the founder of Luxembourg, Count Siegfried. When they married, she requested Siegfried to leave her alone for one full day and night every month, and that he should not ask or try to find out what she was doing.

Siegfried accepted this wish, and all went well for years. On the first Wednesday of the month, Mélusine would retire into her chambers in the "casemates," a network of caverns underneath the city, not to be seen again until early light on Thursday.

But one day, Siegfried's curiosity got the better of him. Wondering what his wife might be doing alone all the time, he peeped through the keyhole, and was shocked to see that Mélusine was lying in the bathtub, with a fishtail hanging over the rim. Realizing that her husband had come to know the truth about her, she jumped out of the window into the river Alzette below, never to be seen again.

Every now and then, people claim to have seen a beautiful girl's head pop out of the river, and a fishtail rippling the calm waters of the river Alzette.

According to another legend, Mélusine is imprisoned within the rock that helped form Luxembourg City's tremendous defenses. She passes the time by knitting, but thankfully she manages only one stitch each year, because should she finish her knitting before she's released, all of Luxembourg and its people will vanish into the rock with her!

Once every seven years, Mélusine returns, either as a serpent with a golden key in its mouth or as a beautiful woman.

All it will take to win her freedom is for some brave soul to kiss the womanly vision or take the key from the serpent's mouth. That brave soul has yet to appear, and in the meantime Luxembourg prays for her to drop a stitch or two, so that whatever it is she's knitting will take a very long time to complete!

- Source: <http://luxembourgish.blogspot.com/2006/11/mysterious-maiden-mlusine.html>, last accessed August 2, 2013. [No longer active.]
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Melusina

Germany

In Baden there is a forest named Stollenwald, and in this forest, atop Stollenberg Mountain, are the ruins of an old castle. Stauffenberg Palace stands nearby. In this palace there once lived a magistrate's son who took great pleasure in capturing birds. One day he went into the woods to trap titmice. There he heard a beautiful voice descending from Stollenberg mountain. Following it, he saw the most lovely image of a woman, which called out to him:

Redeem me, redeem me!
Just kiss me three times three!

"Who are you then?" called the youth, and the specter said:

Melusina is my name,
The daughter of heavenly song!
Early in the ninth hour,
Fearlessly kiss my mouth and my cheeks,
Then I shall be redeemed,
And be with you, my beloved bridegroom!

Looking at the miraculous being more closely, the youth saw that Melusina had a marvelously beautiful face, blue eyes, and blond hair. Her upper body too was wonderfully proportioned, but not her hands and feet. Her hands had no fingers, resembling instead small open bags, and she had no feet at all, but rather a snake's body. Nonetheless, the youth fearlessly gave the specter the first three kisses. She expressed joy in this, like the maiden in the heathen's cave with her first kiss, and then she disappeared.

The next morning the lover returned and followed the seductively sweet song that sounded toward him. Finding her, he saw that she now had wings. Her snake's body was speckled green and ended with a dragon's tail. But Melusina's eyes and face emanated such beauty, and her mouth was so seductive, that he was overcome by desire, and he again gave her three kisses. She quivered with lust and desire, flapping her wings about his head.

That night the youth could scarcely close his eyes. All his thoughts were with the glowing, sensuously beautiful figure. Before daybreak he went into the woods and followed the sweet songful voice. But alas! Where was the lovely angel face? It was transformed and looked just like the maiden on the toad-chair, for Melusina now had a toad's head, and the lover was supposed to kiss it as though nothing had happened. But instead, he turned his heels and ran away as fast as he could. Behind him he heard a rushing sound and cries of anguish.

He never again went to Stollenberg Mountain. On the contrary, he became engaged to a girl who, although not as magically beautiful as Melusina, nonetheless did not have a toad's head and a snake's body.

The wedding feast at Stauffenberg Palace was ready, and everyone was celebrating, when a small crack opened in the ceiling. A dew-like drop fell into the serving dish, but no one saw it. And anyone who took a bite onto which the drop had fallen fell down dead. And from above a small snake's tail emerged through the crack in the ceiling.

That was the end of the wedding celebration.

On another occasion Melusina appeared to a shepherd girl. At length she led the girl into Stollenberg Mountain. Showing her underground treasures, she told the shepherd girl that they would be hers if she could bring about her disenchantment. The girl was unable to keep this secret, and the priest threatened her with church sanctions if she continued to commune with the specter. This silenced the shepherd girl, and the disenchantment was not fulfilled.

A double fir tree growing from a single root still stands near the place they call "the twelve stones." It is called "the Melusina tree."

In keeping with this Swabian legend, the name Melusina refers not only to water sprites but to mountain and forest sprites as well.

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- Source: Ludwig Bechstein, "Melusine," *Deutsches Sagenbuch* (Leipzig: Verlag von Georg Wigand), 1853), [no. 894, pp. 729-30](#).
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 1998.
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Herr Peter Dimringer von Staufenberg

Germany

Staufenberg, the ancestral castle of the knight Peter Dimringer -- the subject of legend -- is in Ortenau not far from Offenburg. Early one Whitsunday the knight had his servant saddle his horse, for he wanted to ride from his fortress to Nussbach to hear the morning prayers. The boy rode ahead. As he entered the forest he saw a beautiful, richly bejeweled maiden sitting all alone on a rock. She greeted him, and the servant rode on. Soon thereafter Herr Peter himself came by, looked at her with pleasure, then greeted the maiden and spoke to her cordially.

She bowed to him and said, "God thank you for your greeting."

Then Peter dismounted his horse. She offered her hands to him. He lifted her from the rock and put his arms around her. They sat in the grass and talked about what she was doing.

"Pardon me, my beautiful lady, may I ask you a sincere question? Tell me, why are you sitting here alone with no one near you?"

"I tell you friend, on my honor, I have been waiting here for you. I have loved you since you first learned to ride a horse. I have secretly watched over you and protected you with my own hand, keeping you from harm in battles and in wars, on roads and on byways."

The knight answered virtuously, "Nothing better could have happened to me than to have met you. My desire is to be with you until death."

"That can be," said the maiden, "if you will follow my words. If you want to love me then you must take no other woman in marriage. If you were to do so, you would die on the third day. Whenever you are alone and desire me, I will be with you immediately, and you will live happily and with pleasure."

Herr Peter said, "My lady, is that all true?"

With God as her witness, she swore it was true. Then he promised to be hers, and they exchanged vows with each other. The lady asked that the wedding be held at Staufenberg. She gave him a beautiful ring. They laughed together virtuously and embraced, and then Herr Peter continued on his way. He attended mass in the village and said his own prayers, then returned home to his fortress.

As soon as he was alone in his bower, he thought to himself, "If only I had my dear bride here with me, whom I found out there on the rock!" As soon as he said these words she stood there before his eyes. They kissed one another and were together with pleasure.

Thus they lived for a while. In addition, she gave him money and property, so that he could have a good life on earth. Later he went abroad, and wherever he went, his wife was with him whenever he wished for her.

Finally he returned to his homeland. His brothers and friends insisted that he take himself a wife. He was taken back and tried to make an excuse. They applied even more pressure through a wise man, one of his relatives.

Herr Peter answered, "I will have my body cut into strips before I marry."

That evening after they had left, his wife already knew what they were trying to do, and he repeated his pledge to her.

At that time the German king was to be elected in Frankfurt, and Herr von Staufenberg, accompanied by many servants and noblemen, journeyed there. He distinguished himself so greatly at the tournament that he attracted the king's attention, and in the end the king offered him the hand in marriage of his aunt from Kärnten [Carinthia]. Herr Peter, filled with concern, rejected the proposal. This caused a great stir among the princes, who wanted to know his reason. Finally he told them that he already had a beautiful wife who was exceedingly good to him, and on account of whom he could not take another one, or within three days he would be dead.

Then the bishop said, "Herr, let me see the woman."

He said, "She does not allow herself to be seen by anyone but me."

"Then she is not a true woman," they all said, "but from the devil. And if you are making love with a she-devil more than with pure women, that will corrupt your name and your reputation before the whole world."

Confused by this talk, Herr von Staufenberg said that he wanted to do whatever the king desired of him, and he was forthwith betrothed to the maiden and given costly royal gifts.

In accordance with Peter's wishes, the wedding was to take place in Ortenau.

The next time his wife came to him she reproached him sadly for having violated her prohibition and his promise, for which he would now forfeit his young life. "I will give you the following sign: When, at your wedding celebration, you together with the other men and women see my foot then you must immediately confess your sins and prepare yourself for death."

With that Peter thought about the clergyman's words, that perhaps she was only trying to enchant him with these threats and that it was all only a lie.

The young bride was soon brought to Staufenberg, and a great feast was held. The knight was seated across from her at the table when they suddenly saw something push through the ceiling: a beautiful human foot, up to the knee, as white as ivory.

The knight turned pale and cried out, "Oh, my friends, you have destroyed me. In three days I shall be dead."

The foot disappeared without leaving a hole in the ceiling. The piping, dancing, and singing ceased, and a clergyman was summoned. The knight took leave from his bride, confessed his sins, and then his heart ruptured. His young wife retreated to a convent and prayed to God for his soul. The valiant knight was mourned in all the German lands.

In the sixteenth century, according to the testimony of Fischart, people throughout the entire region still knew the story of Peter from Staufenberg and the beautiful sea sprite, as they called her in those days. To this day the Zwölfstein [Twelve-Stone] can be seen between Staufenberg, Nussbach, and Weilershofen, where she first appeared to him. And in the castle they still show the room where she stayed from time to time.

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- Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, "Herr Peter Dimringer von Staufenberg," [*Deutsche Sagen*](#), vol. 2 (Berlin: in der Nicolaischen Buchhandlung, 1818), [no. 522](#), [pp. 249-53](#). In later editions this legend is numbered 528.
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 1998.
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The Water Maid

Germany

At the time when there was nothing in the Harz but virgin forest, a knight came here to hunt. Before he could orient himself, he became lost, and he wandered about for several days without finding a path.

Finally he came upon a beautiful castle situated in a large meadow and surrounded with water. A pathway led to a drawbridge, which had been suspended.

He called out; he whistled; he waited. He didn't hear anything from within. It was as though the castle had died out.

"Wait," he thought. "The castle cannot be empty. Someone will have to appear shortly. Just sit here and wait until someone comes." So he sat and waited, but the castle remained silent. Finally his patience wore out, and he was just making preparations to leave when he saw a beautiful girl emerge from the forest and walk toward the bridge.

"Wait," he thought. "She knows her way around here. She is going inside." And that is what happened. When she was within a few steps of him, he spoke to her, telling her that he had lost his way in the Harz Forest, that he had camped out eight days in the open, and that he was eager at last to spend a night under a proper roof. He had already sat here for three hours asking for admission, but no one had shown himself or let himself be heard. Further, he asked if she would be so good to ask permission for him to enter once she was inside.

She said that that would not be necessary. He could come with her. She did not need to ask anyone for permission, for she herself was in charge here. With that she stepped on a stone that was mortared into the earth in front of the bridge, and the bridge immediately descended. Then she took out a large key and unlocked the gate. Together they walked through a large courtyard and into the castle.

She led the knight into a beautiful room and asked him to make himself comfortable. She told him that before anything else, she wanted to go and prepare a proper evening meal. Surely he would like something hot to eat,

she said, adding that she too was hungry. Because she had no servants, she would have to take care of everything by herself.

With that she left the room. A short time later she returned with a beautiful roast, cakes, and many other delicious things. She set the table and invited her guest to help himself. He did not need to be asked a second time.

After they had eaten, they sat together and talked with one another. The knight said that he felt sorry for the friendly girl, because she lived here all alone, observing that time must pass very slowly for her.

"Oh no," she said. "Time does not pass slowly for me," adding that nonetheless she sometimes did wish for company, but if she did not have any, she could still manage just fine.

The knight answered that if she did not mind, he would stay here a few days and keep her company.

The hostess replied that she would be happy if he would do so.

The guest remained one, two, three days, and they became so accustomed to one another that in the end the knight asked her if she did not want to become his wife. The girl was pleased with this, and she said that she would love to do so, if he would only promise her that every Friday she would be able to go out and do whatever she wanted to, and that he would not try to follow her or look after her. This he promised her, and they became a couple.

They lived together a long time, satisfied with one another. They produced lovely children, and in their happiness they lacked nothing.

One day a strange knight came and was given lodging. It was on a Friday, and he asked about the lady of the house, because she had not made an appearance. The master of the house told him that his wife was never to be seen on a Friday, and that he -- in keeping with his promise -- had never sought after her. With that the strange knight asked what kind of a housewife would not tell her husband where she could be found. Nothing good could come from such behavior.

This conversation so alarmed the master of the house that he immediately set out to find his wife. After a long search, he finally came to the cellar, where he found a door. Opening it, he saw his wife, half fish and half human, swimming in a small pond. When she saw her husband, she cast a sad and serious glance at him, and then disappeared.

The bewildered man went back upstairs to tell the strange knight what he had experienced, but he too had disappeared. Now the poor man realized that he and his wife had been cruelly deceived and victimized by the stranger.

He grieved so much for his good wife that he died soon afterward. The lovely children also died one after the other, and the castle fell into ruins. It is not even known where it formerly stood. Only the story remains.

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- Source: August Ey, "Die Wasserjungfer," *Harzmärchenbuch; oder, Sagen und Märchen aus dem Oberharze* (Stade: Verlag von Fr. Steudel, 1862), pp. 173-76.
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 1998.
 - The Harz is a forested, mountainous region in north central Germany. Its highest mountain, the Brocken, is -- according to legend -- the site of a great gathering of witches on the eve of the first day in May each year.
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Brauhard's Mermaid

Germany

Many years ago a man named Brauhard lived in Lauterberg. He had been far away across the water and had brought home a mermaid, whom he married. Her top half was human, but her bottom half was formed like a fish. She lived in a tub in his house. However, his friends could not stand the malformed woman, and so they finally poisoned her. He did not remarry, and he contributed the money he had received as her dowry to the poor. That is the source of the Brauhard Fund which to this day is administered by the Scharzfeld Jurisdiction for the support of the poor in the surrounding villages.

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- Source: A. Kuhn and W. Schwartz, "Brauhards Seejungfer," [*Norddeutsche Sagen, Märchen und Gebräuche aus Meklenburg, \[Mecklenburg\], Pommern, der Mark, Sachsen, Thüringen, Braunschweig, Hannover, Oldenburg und Westfalen*](#) (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1848), [no. 259, pp. 232-33](#).
 - Kuhn's and Schwartz's source: "Oral tradition from Steina."
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 1998.
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Melusina

Germany

In Bärigen during a wind storm they say that "Melusina is crying for her children." This must be true, because otherwise on Christmas Eve, at which time one is supposed to eat nine kinds of food, they would not shake the leftovers from the tablecloth onto a bush so that Melusina, sometimes also known as St. Melusina, might also have something to eat.

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- Source: Joh. Aug. Ernst Köhler, [*Sagenbuch des Erzgebirges*](#) (Schneeberg and Schwarzenberg: Verlag und Druck von Carl Moritz Gärtner, 1886), [no. 201, p. 155](#).
 - Translated by D. L. Ashliman. © 1998.
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